

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

GUN VIOLENCE ECONOMIC EQUITY ACT OF 1995

HON. CARDISS COLLINS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 20, 1995

Mrs. COLLINS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks the GOP leadership has been leading the charge to slash social spending in America, place poor children in orphanages, and punish welfare recipients for their underprivileged status. Many among the Republican ranks would like to eliminate the Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development, washing their hands of Federal responsibility in these areas. In addition, there is a GOP attack being waged on the vital prevention dollars that my Democratic colleagues and I fought so hard to keep intact in last year's crime bill. My friends on the opposite side of the aisle seem to believe in building walls around our inner-city communities rather than building futures for the youth that are struggling to succeed in those neighborhoods.

The attitude from the GOP and its Contract With America seems to be *que será será*, whatever will be, will be. Let's let market forces work and we'll hope for the best. Well, I've got quite a surprise for you Mr. Speaker. Given that approach, you and your Republican friends will probably want to join my Democratic colleagues in cosponsoring a bill of mine, H.R. 174, the Gun Violence Economic Equity Act of 1995.

I think we can all agree in this body that the gun violence plaguing our Nation is way past epidemic proportions and threatens to wipe out the hopes and dreams of all our future generations. Last Congress I was elated that, finally, after years of prolonged struggle with the "just say no" gun lobby, we were able to pass the Brady bill, along with a ban on 19 different types of assault weapons. These commonsense measures should have been in the books years ago and their passage serves the "Not Really Attuned" NRA with a loud wake-up call that the American people no longer stand for their attempts to block any and all rational gun control legislation.

Our children are at risk and we must continue to bring some sanity to our gun regulatory framework. In 1992 alone, in my city of Chicago, 741 youths 19 years of age and under were victims of gun injuries and early reports for 1993 and 1994 indicate rising numbers. At Children's Memorial Medical Center in Chicago, the number of children 16 and under treated for gunshot wounds skyrocketed 250 percent from 1988 to 1993. This is disgraceful tragedy. More can and must be done. I believe H.R. 174 would greatly assist us in our long-running quest to end the madness on our streets.

Mr. Speaker, I still believe the best way to control handguns is to ban them outright. However, if we have decided that gun owner-

ship has some value in our society, then we should allow market forces to dictate the true cost of that ownership. This is the rationale behind the Gun Violence Economic Equity Act.

H.R. 174 would make manufacturers, dealers, and importers of handguns and assault weapons strictly liable for damages resulting in injury and death from the use of these weapons to the victims and survivors of victims.

By holding these parties liable for the damages caused by their products we will make certain that they share their appropriate culpability in the mayhem and destruction that their products inflict in both my congressional district and other communities all throughout America. These gun peddlers should understand that they must also take responsibility for their part in perpetuating the violence we have become all too accustomed to reading about in the daily papers.

This legislation in no way decreases or diminishes the responsibility of individuals who own or use guns in cities and towns. Undoubtedly the appropriate laws or civil actions still apply and should be taken. A person who directly commits an act of violence is responsible for his or her actions, but the manufacturers and sellers of handguns and assault weapons are also partners in these acts and must be viewed as such under the law.

Holding these parties liable also places the heavy economic cost of violence on the appropriate groups. Every one of us pays for gun violence in a myriad of ways. We pay in support to public hospitals whose trauma centers become overburdened with uncompensated care to victims of gunshot wounds. We pay in increased hospital insurance costs. We pay by having to subsidize the costs of increased security measures employed by businesses which we patronize. This list goes on and on.

Successful suits by victims against gun manufacturers and distributors will increase the manufacturer's cost of doing business. In turn, manufacturers will pass on the cost by increasing the price of guns sold in order to be able to cover future court awards. The more injuries a particular weapon causes, the more a strict liability rule will increase the price and reduce the quantity demanded of that type of gun. Hopefully, an increase in the cost of doing business will make a manufacturer think twice about producing dangerous and needless weapons for our communities.

Since there are many different models of guns, a strict liability rule would cause variable pricing of these guns according to the gun's history of being used to cause injury and death. The guns that cause the most net loss would show the sharpest declines in quantities sold. Guns that are safer, or because of type or selective marketing are rarely used in violent acts, would experience a smaller increase in price and a smaller decline in sales.

Mr. Speaker, if we had a strict liability rule in place a long time ago maybe we wouldn't have to argue about the epidemic level of gun violence that we face in the United States

today. Maybe we wouldn't have to watch scenes of children attending funerals of their classmates on the evening news or read about police officers killed because they were outgunned by thugs and felons.

The American people are extremely anxious for the 104th Congress to take significant action to confront the most pressing problems facing our society, foremost of which continues to be gun violence. I urge my colleagues, therefore, to join me in supporting the Gun Violence Economic Equity Act of 1995 and signaling to the American people that we are committed to taking decisive and immediate action to bring down the number of deadly weapons in our streets and in our lives.

END SSI ABUSE

HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 20, 1995

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing a bill to end an outrageous abuse of a program designed to aid our most vulnerable citizens: the aged, blind, and disabled. Reports by the General Accounting Office and the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services tell us that some families teach their children to feign mental illness or retardation so that the parents can collect SSI checks once the children are diagnosed as being unable to function in an age-appropriate manner. Parents are not required to spend these checks to assist their disabled children.

These parents abuse the SSI program's flexibility in the case of a child whose condition does not match one on the published list of medical impairments considered severe enough to preclude any gainful activity.

Yesterday's Washington Post reports bipartisan concern about these abuses by parents who can increase their welfare checks from \$6,204 to \$11,652 for a single parent with two children, when one child is enrolled in SSI. The Republican plan is to take a meat ax to all SSI checks for disabled children. This is not reform, but a mindless attack on families already under severe stress caring for seriously ill children. We must not solve this problem by eliminating the modest support we pay to parents who are poor because they stay at the bedside of a dying child.

The bill I am introducing today would preserve SSI benefits for disabled children, but in the case of children who become eligible as a result of the alternative process so many are now abusing, the benefits would come in the form of vouchers for services needed by the child in connection with the disability. I urge my colleagues to join with me in enacting a humane way of eliminating abuse of the SSI program by unscrupulous parents.

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